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FM AMEMBASSY OUAGADOUGOU
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3708
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INFO AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
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C O N F I D E N T I A L OUAGADOUGOU 000432

AF/W FOR TDOUGHERTY, EPLUMB, JHUTCHISON
NSC FOR KAREN O'DONNELL

E.O. 12958: DECLASSIFY ON 5/22/2018
TAGS: [PREL](#) [EAID](#) [UV](#) [IS](#) [RW](#) [UG](#) [TO](#)
SUBJECT: SUBJECT: Burkina Faso: Compaore Seeks to Win Favor
with United States during Visit to Israel

Classified by Ambassador Jackson for reasons 1.4 (b) (d)

11. (C) Key Points:

-- President Blaise Compaore visited Israel May 13-15 for that country's 60th anniversary celebrations - the first ever visit by a Burkinabe head of state.

-- Compaore was one of only three African heads of state attending.

-- Previously, Libyan leader Muammar Qaddafi reportedly sent a letter to Compaore demanding that he not go to Israel.

12. (C) Key Judgments:

-- Israel, eager to win favor with Burkina Faso while it is a member of the UN Security Council (2008-2009), promised to reinforce bilateral aid, now concentrated in agriculture, education, and health. Compaore received acclamation by the Knesset for his remarks about Israel's right to peacefully co-exist with its neighbors, and was hailed as a "man of peace" by Nobel Peace Prize winner Elie Weisel for his peace mediation in Cote d'Ivoire.

-- Compaore mainly used the trip to Israel to win favor with the United States. Compaore hopes to be invited to an Oval Office meeting with President Bush as part of a trip in which Compaore could also witness the signing on July 16 of a \$480 million Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) Compact with Burkina Faso.

-- Compaore, who agreed to return for a state visit to Israel in 2009, skillfully deflected potential domestic criticism of his visit by leading a mixed Muslim (about 52% of Burkina Faso's population), and Christian (about 25%) delegation of Burkinabe on a pilgrimage-like visit to holy sites of Islam and Christianity.

End Key Points and Key Judgments.

13. (C) Making the first visit by a Burkinabe head of state, President Blaise Compaore attended ceremonies May 13-15 commemorating the 60th anniversary of Israel's founding. President Compaore also attended a dinner given by President Peres with a number of Israeli cabinet members as well as Ambassadors to Israel from Egypt, Mauritania, Cameroon, Ghana and Nigeria. During that dinner, the President of the Knesset invited President Compaore to the Israeli Parliament for President Bush's address, according to Philippe Sawadogo, Burkina Faso Minister of Culture, Tourism and Communications. (Note: Sawadogo said that Compaore was the only President invited to attend that event. We cannot confirm the validity of this information, but note that Compaore was "acclaimed" during a visit to the Knesset, according to "Le Pays," a normally anti-Israeli private

daily published in Ouagadougou. End Note.)

¶4. (U) According to Burkina Faso Foreign Minister Djibrill Bassole, Compaore discussed with Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni how to expand bilateral aid, currently focused in agriculture, education, and health. They also discussed Israel's support for Burkina Faso in its role as (2008-2009) member of the UN Security Council, and Burkina Faso's peace efforts in West Africa including Cote d'Ivoire. Bassole added that he would return to Israel in a few weeks for more detailed discussions.

¶5. (U) President Compaore also met with Nobel Peace Prize Winner Elie Wiesel to discuss a wide range of world issues. Wiesel is quoted in Ouagadougou newspapers as having said "Blaise Compaore is a man of peace," referring to Compaore's "direct dialogue" in resolving crises in the region including Cote d'Ivoire.

Compaore Joins Other Heads of State at Conference Marking Israel's 60th Anniversary

¶6. (SBU) Compaore also participated with 11 other former or current heads of state in a "Tomorrow" conference to mark Israel's 60th anniversary. These heads of state included Presidents Yoweri Museveni of Uganda and Paul Kagame of Rwanda, as well as ex-UK Prime Minister Tony Blair. (The fourth African head of state invited was Togo President Faure Gnassingbe, who was represented by one of his ministers.) Compaore's remarks about Israel's right to "peaceful coexistence" with its neighbors earned him an ovation at the conference, according to the official Burkinabe daily "Sidwaya." (Sawadogo said that Compaore's speech received more applause than any other.)

Libya's Qaddafi Upset By Compaore's Visit to Israel

¶7. (C) Sawadogo volunteered that, when Qaddafi learned that President Compaore had agreed to attend the ceremonies, he was outraged and sent a letter to the President demanding that he reconsider. President Compaore was only encouraged by this and stated to his advisors that "we must listen to everyone." Compaore hopes that other African countries will follow the lead of Burkina Faso, the Minister said. Reflecting on the past, Sawadogo said that many countries had listened to Libya for quite some time, but that many had become disillusioned. He said that many people believe that Africans cannot reflect, organize, manage, or maintain, and that he believes Burkina Faso can prove them wrong.

U.S.-based Jewish Advocacy Group Praises Compaore, Who Badly Wants Meeting with President Bush

¶8. (C) Burkina Faso Ambassador to the United States Paramanga Ernest Yonli told Ambassador on May 21 that he had received a letter from the American Jewish Committee -- an advocacy group founded in 1906 with over 20 U.S. offices -- congratulating President Compaore on his visit to Israel. Yonli confided to Ambassador that he was under tremendous pressure to secure a meeting for Compaore with President Bush.

Decision to Accept Israeli Invitation: Supported by Burkinabe Christians, Useful for U.S. Bilateral Ties

¶9. (C) Sawadogo said that Israel had only invited a few African heads of state, and that President Compaore and his advisors had reflected carefully on the invitation prior to acceptance. He said that 50% of decision makers in Burkina Faso are Christian and that they all grew up learning about Israel. Sawadogo mentioned the increased number of pilgrimages to Israel undertaken by Burkinabe in the recent past. So it was only natural that Burkina Faso be represented at the anniversary celebrations, he concluded.

(Note: Christians make up only about 25% of the population, but tend to be better educated and have a disproportionate share of senior positions of the Compaore Government. Compaore is Catholic. End note.)

¶10. (C) Sawadogo also emphasized that Burkina Faso recognized that the United States was a good friend of Israel, which made Compaore's Government even more confident in its decision that Compaore attend the celebrations and cultivate a closer relationship. Sawadogo said that President Compaore desired to demonstrate his integrity to the United States and has been "helpful" to Washington in several areas. President Compaore recently received Microsoft President Steve Ballmer in Ouagadougou (at the time of the Microsoft Africa Best Practices Conference here), Sawadogo noted, adding that some French businessmen had seen this as yet another U.S. incursion into traditionally French business in Francophone Africa.

Compaore Heads Off Opposition by Burkinabe Muslims

¶11. (U) Reframing his visit for a majority Muslim, domestic audience, Compaore explained in an interview in Jerusalem with "Le Pays" that he had come to Israel to "encourage the international community to accompany Palestinians and Israelis to reinforce their dialogue in order to reach an agreement delineating the frontier between their two states." Compaore also recalled that the African Union had called for "two separate states, living side-by-side in security and peace."

¶12. (SBU) Reflecting Burkina Faso's religious diversity and his own finely tuned political instincts, Compaore invited on the trip a large delegation of Burkinabe Muslims, Catholics, and Protestants. Compaore and his delegation made "pilgrimages" to holy sites of both Islam and Christianity including the Al-Aqsa Mosque complex including the Dome of the Rock and the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, according to "Sidwaya." In a moving gesture toward his Israeli hosts, Compaore, wearing a skullcap, also relit the eternal flame at the Museum of the Shoah, and called the holocaust a "shameful history of our humanity."

Second Front in Israel's Charm Offensive: Israeli Ambassador Woos Burkinabe in Ouagadougou

¶13. (C) Meanwhile, back in Ouagadougou, the Israeli Ambassador to Burkina Faso, resident in Abidjan, hosted a 60th anniversary reception at a small restaurant attended by Ambassador. Security was unusually tight. Burkina Faso Prime Minister Tertius Zongo, who was also formerly Ambassador to Washington and who rarely attends national day receptions, attended along with a half dozen ministers, a few businessmen and diplomats, and what were apparently Burkinabe students who may have been on agricultural exchanges in Israel. The Israeli Ambassador emphasized Israel's admiration for President Compaore's role as regional peacemaker, and lauded Compaore's future state visit to Israel, expected in 2009. MOFA's Secretary General and Cabinet Director told Ambassador that the Israeli Ambassador was already driving them crazy with requests for information for planning the state visit.

Historical Context of Burkinabe-Israeli Relations: Broken in 1973, Reestablished by Compaore in 1993

¶14. (SBU) Burkina Faso's diplomatic relations with Israel debuted in 1961 with the signature of an accord on bilateral cooperation that included training of Burkinabe agronomists and the establishment of a national lottery. Diplomatic relations were severed in 1973 following Israel's October War by then President Aboubacar Sangoule Lamizana, a Muslim who had been head of the armed forces when he came to power in a 1965 coup d'etat. Then Foreign Minister Malick Zorome, also a Muslim, likely recommended Lamizana to break

relations with Israel, perhaps after pressure from other member-countries of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC). Compaore, a Christian who came to power in 1987 in a coup d'etat, reestablished diplomatic relations with Israel in 1993 - a decision hailed during his Israel visit as "courageous."

JACKSON